



COUNSELLING DIVERSE GROUPS

CAN A THERAPIST HELP A WITCH?

Written and presented by Kaitlyn
Hillier and Dr. Paul Jerry

INTRODUCTION

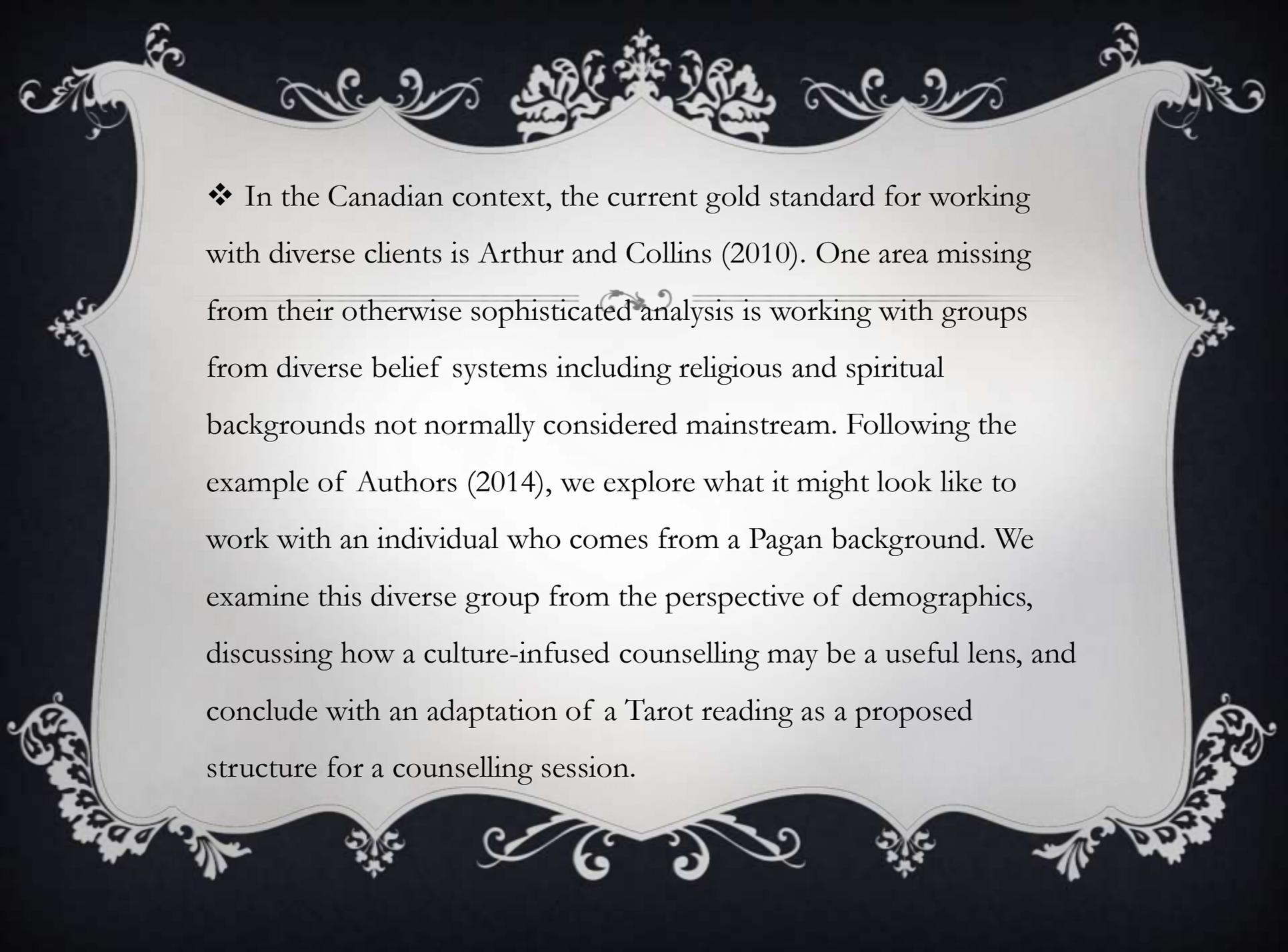
- ❖ Counsellors will meet many clients from diverse backgrounds during their career. Both the aspirational ideal as well as the clinical reality pushes counsellors to be able to work with all clients effectively.
- ❖ In order to do so, a counsellor should employ two strategies. The first is a top down framework for handling diversity. Here we invoke the model put forth by Arthur and Collins (2010) as a guide. Second, a counsellor should be familiar from the bottom up with specific cultural issues of identified groups.
- ❖ One group that is rarely, if at all mentioned in the literature is the group generally subsumed under the category of Paganism, including Wicca and others. This communication examines the application of a cultural framework as well as the specific details of this unique group with the intent that a counsellor might be better prepared to work with them, should they present for help.



COUNSELLING DIVERSE GROUPS: CAN A THERAPIST HELP A WITCH?

❖ Counsellors are as likely as any professional group to find themselves working with unique and non-traditional groups (Arthur & Collins, 2010). In fact, it is likely that a counsellor, who is often tasked with supporting non-mainstream client groups, will eventually find the opportunity to work with clients who identify some variation of Paganism.

❖ This contribution explores the diverse subgroups who appear to comprise the larger category of Pagan with a view to examining how it might be possible for an otherwise “mainstream” counsellor to successfully work with members of this unique group.



❖ In the Canadian context, the current gold standard for working with diverse clients is Arthur and Collins (2010). One area missing from their otherwise sophisticated analysis is working with groups from diverse belief systems including religious and spiritual backgrounds not normally considered mainstream. Following the example of Authors (2014), we explore what it might look like to work with an individual who comes from a Pagan background. We examine this diverse group from the perspective of demographics, discussing how a culture-infused counselling may be a useful lens, and conclude with an adaptation of a Tarot reading as a proposed structure for a counselling session.



WHO ARE WE TALKING ABOUT

- ❖ Who are witches? What do they believe in? How can a therapist best assist a witch? Paganism is often used as the umbrella term, and is based on the word “Pagan” meaning “one of a people or community observing a polytheistic religion, as the ancient Romans and Greeks” and; “a follower of any of various contemporary religions that are based on the worship of nature or the Earth; a Neopagan” (para.1 full ref from dictionary.com). Both definitions are correct in their own right, but not all Pagans refer to themselves as or identify with witches. In the main author’s experience as a practicing Pagan, it is often easiest to explain themselves by simply stating as a last resort, “I am a witch”.

WITCHES AND PAGANS

❖ There are stereotypes associated with Paganism from a Wiccan standpoint, and argue that the way witches practice their faith is akin to therapeutic methodology and utility. For example, West (2005) notes that “the path of the Craft is as much a journey of self-exploration as it is a journey into other worlds... through a process of self-development we can become who we’re really capable of being and ... able to realize the magic we know we are capable of...” (p.x). This example strongly resembles the process we share with our clients within the therapeutic environment.

WITCHES AND PAGANS CTD

- ❖ Paganism is a practice that has existed for arguably the longest time, dating back to cave dwellers worshipping the elements and predating common language. It is within the domain of Paganism that many sub-genres exist such as Norse, Wicca, Druid, and Shamanism for example. In addition, these sub-genres have their own sub-genres. Within the Wiccan branch for example, there are numerous areas of practice like Gardnerian, Alexandrian or Dianic Wicca (Wood, 2001). Although some of these belief systems are more structured and organized as faiths, some exist outside of such labels.
- ❖ Since Pagans are so widely spread out, and many have not “come out of the broom closet” it is difficult to guesstimate demographics and populations of “out” witches. Furthermore, the Norse, Native, Shamanic, Druidic and other Pagans may be less inclined to categorize themselves as witches, but would identify as some type of Pagan.



PAGANISM AND TREATMENT



❖ It is fair to argue that since many witches have incorporated either personalized or spiritually based methods to assist them with their everyday stressors, they may not feel it necessary to utilize the services of a trained counsellor or therapist for their mental health. This may be due to the accepted idea within the Pagan community that many ailments, physical or mental can be best addressed through practices like meditation or energy channeling or, alternative medicines like acupuncture or herbal remedies. Furthermore, since little information is available for training and practicing therapists about the Pagan culture and lifestyle it is fair to argue that therapists today may not be equipped with the cultural knowledge necessary to provide the best care to Pagans.



PAGAN STATISTICS

❖ The National Household Survey taken by Statistics Canada in 2011 found that over 50,000 persons openly identified as Pagan, Wiccan or Pagan n.i.e within Canada. It is possible that this number is an under-estimate as many practicing Pagans (of any category or sub-category) may not have participated in the survey or responded as having “No Religious Affiliation” – a category which contained nearly 8 million persons in Canada. It would not be surprising that Pagans would not participate in these types of studies as more often than not such surveys do not reflect the unique lifestyles of practicing Pagans and do not paint an accurate picture of who they are. Such studies typically force persons to respond to “one of the above” and since there is often no specific option to accurately reflect the practicing style of the individual Pagan, many may not feel at all inclined to participate in the studies altogether.

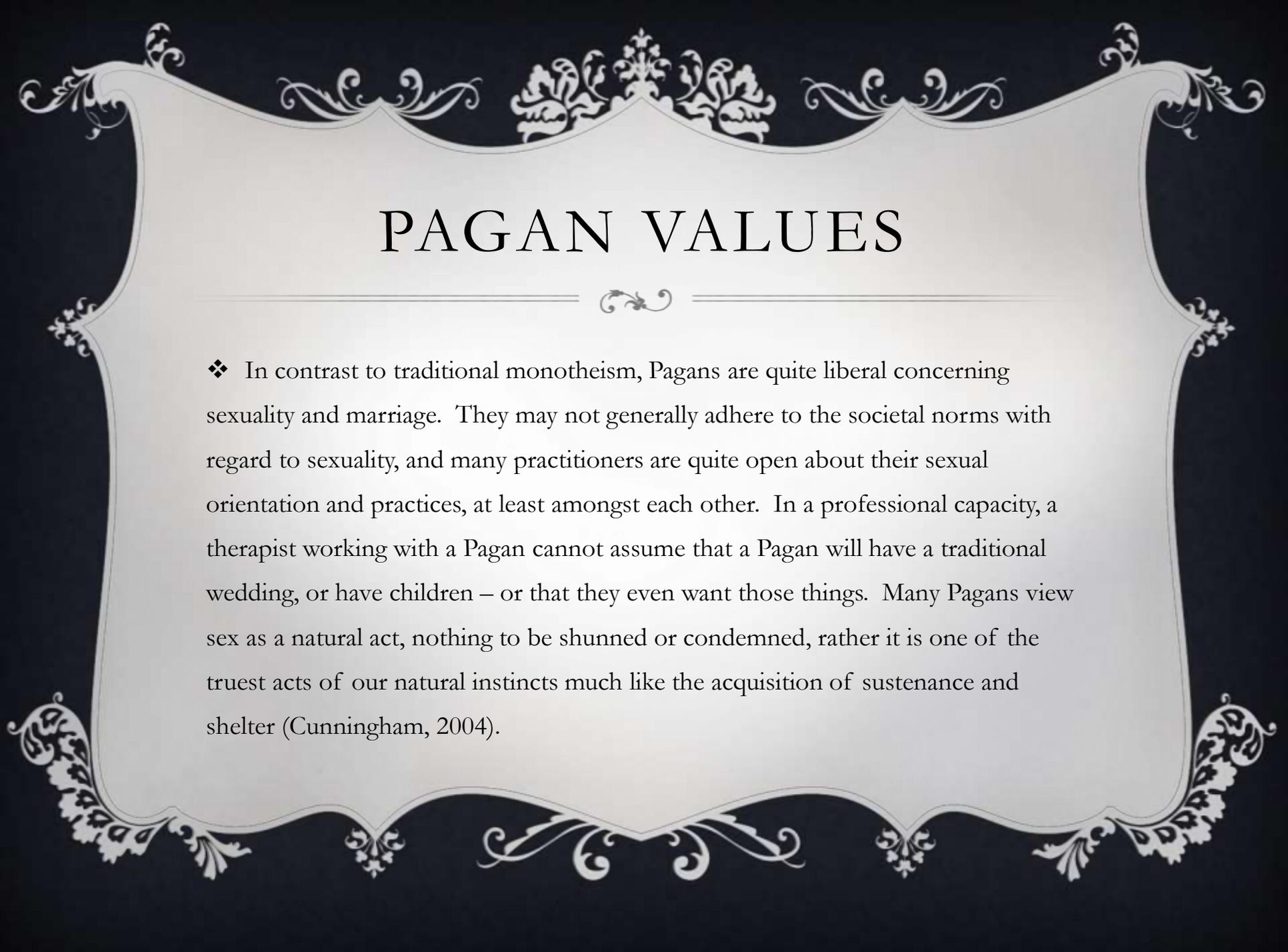
PAGAN STATISTICS CTD.

❖ Hackett & Naylor (2014) of the Pew Research Centre conducted a similar survey to assess religious practice around the world. They found that “India and China have the largest shares (a combined 63%) of the 58 million people in the “other religions” category, which includes Taoism, Shintoism, Sikhism, Wicca, and many others. India and China also are the world’s two biggest countries in terms of population, together home to 37% of all people” (para. 5). The “other” category seems to be the most popular and yet, most ambiguous option for all persons who do not fit into the Anglo-Saxon, monotheistic categories. The massive number of persons who fit into this “other” category therefore, may feel disenfranchised from such research studies and thus may feel marginalized from professional practices who may also seek to categorize persons within the “other” category of life.



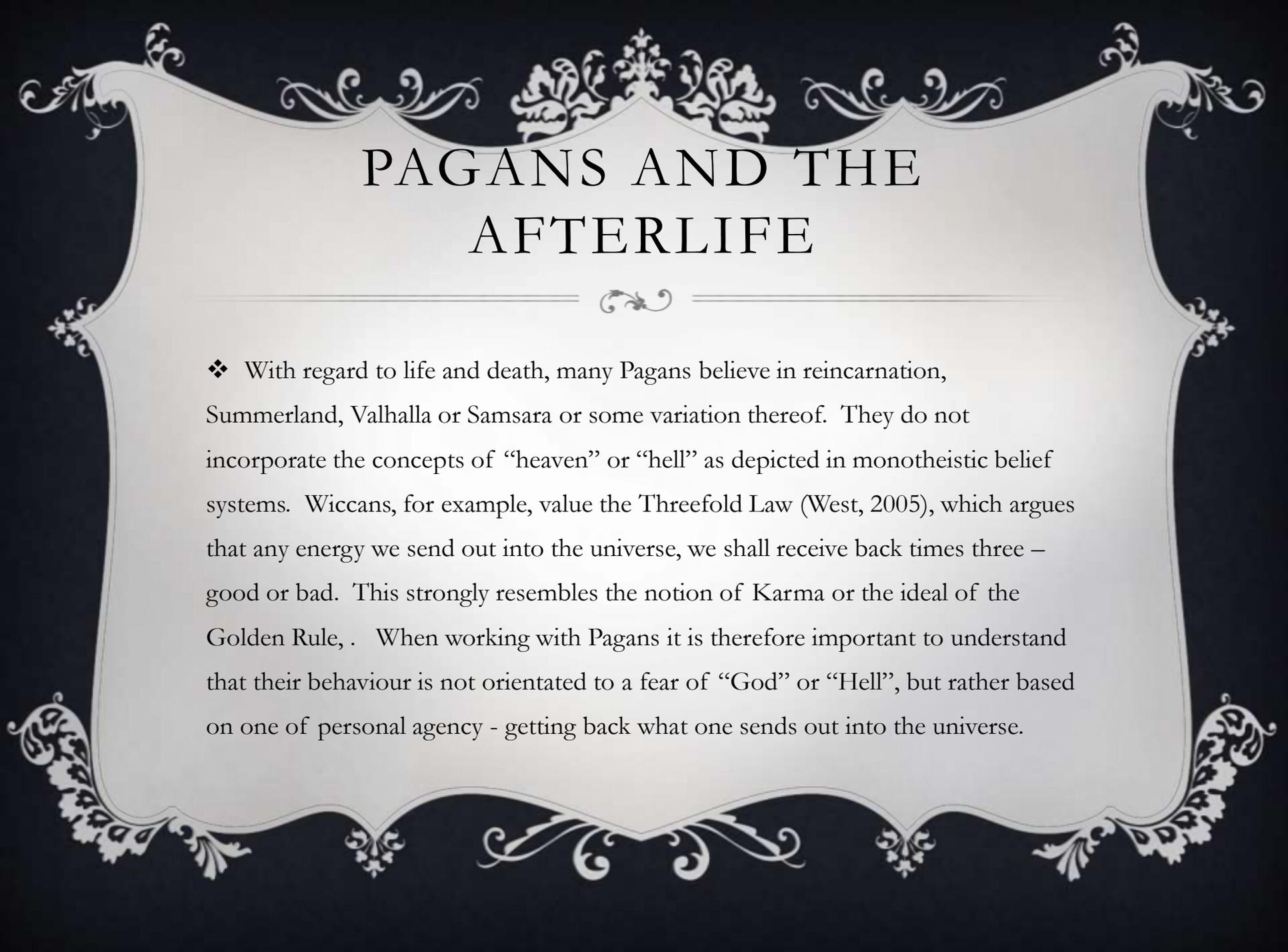
PAGANISM GROWING

❖ It is clear that Paganism and many other alternative belief systems are growing exponentially throughout the world (Hackett & Naylor, 2014). It is imperative within the therapeutic profession to be both aware of and prepared for the client who identifies as such. To be prepared to provide therapeutic service to a Pagan client, it is important to understand the ideals and values of the typical practitioner. One such ideal that all Pagans have is polytheism, the belief of multiple Gods and/or Goddesses (West, 2005). Under this polytheistic umbrella, Pagans understand the necessity of balance between the masculine and the feminine in their practices (West, 2005). Pagans do not believe in the conventional God or Satan, rather they understand that there can be no light without dark, no good without evil – everything has a balance. Pagans understand the significance of their energy and how to disperse it.



PAGAN VALUES

❖ In contrast to traditional monotheism, Pagans are quite liberal concerning sexuality and marriage. They may not generally adhere to the societal norms with regard to sexuality, and many practitioners are quite open about their sexual orientation and practices, at least amongst each other. In a professional capacity, a therapist working with a Pagan cannot assume that a Pagan will have a traditional wedding, or have children – or that they even want those things. Many Pagans view sex as a natural act, nothing to be shunned or condemned, rather it is one of the truest acts of our natural instincts much like the acquisition of sustenance and shelter (Cunningham, 2004).



PAGANS AND THE AFTERLIFE

❖ With regard to life and death, many Pagans believe in reincarnation, Summerland, Valhalla or Samsara or some variation thereof. They do not incorporate the concepts of “heaven” or “hell” as depicted in monotheistic belief systems. Wiccans, for example, value the Threefold Law (West, 2005), which argues that any energy we send out into the universe, we shall receive back times three – good or bad. This strongly resembles the notion of Karma or the ideal of the Golden Rule, . When working with Pagans it is therefore important to understand that their behaviour is not orientated to a fear of “God” or “Hell”, but rather based on one of personal agency - getting back what one sends out into the universe.



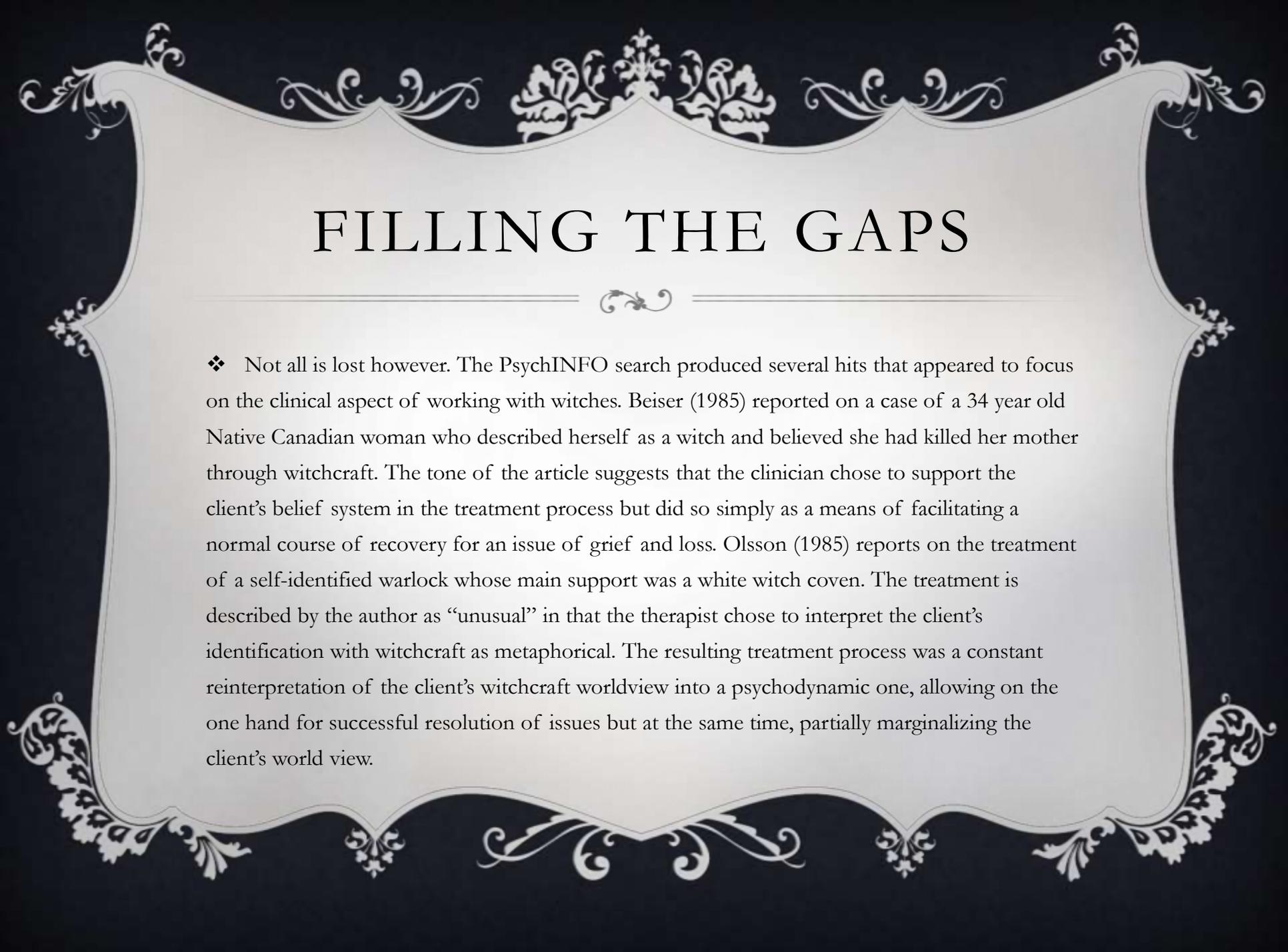
HOW CAN A THERAPIST HELP A WITCH?

❖ What do we know about helping witches? An exploratory search of academic databases is revealing in its paucity of clinical literature. An October 2014 search of Academic Search Complete reveals approximately 61 000 hits for the term “witch”. When filtered to scholarly journals alone, the number drops to just under 23 000. An initial sampling shows titles as diverse as a chemical analysis of Witch Hazel (the plant), historical accounting of witch persecution, cross cultural examinations of witchcraft (e.g., Gypsy witches, Nigerian witches, etc)., and unrelated political or historical documents that appropriate the term “witch hunt” as a descriptor. Combining the term “witch” with “counsel[ing]” results in 13 hits, only one of which is actually related to therapy –an examination of archetypes including the witch archetype.



GAPS IN RESEARCH.

❖ A similar search process applied to PsychINFO produces 597 hits, covering psychologically-orientated articles on child abuse, retrospective examinations of witch hunts, witch scares, and historical Salem through a mental health lens, the linking of the so-called “bad mother” with the witch archetype, and finally, using the term in a pejorative metaphorical manner. Combining the terms “witch” and “counsel[ing]” produced no hits.



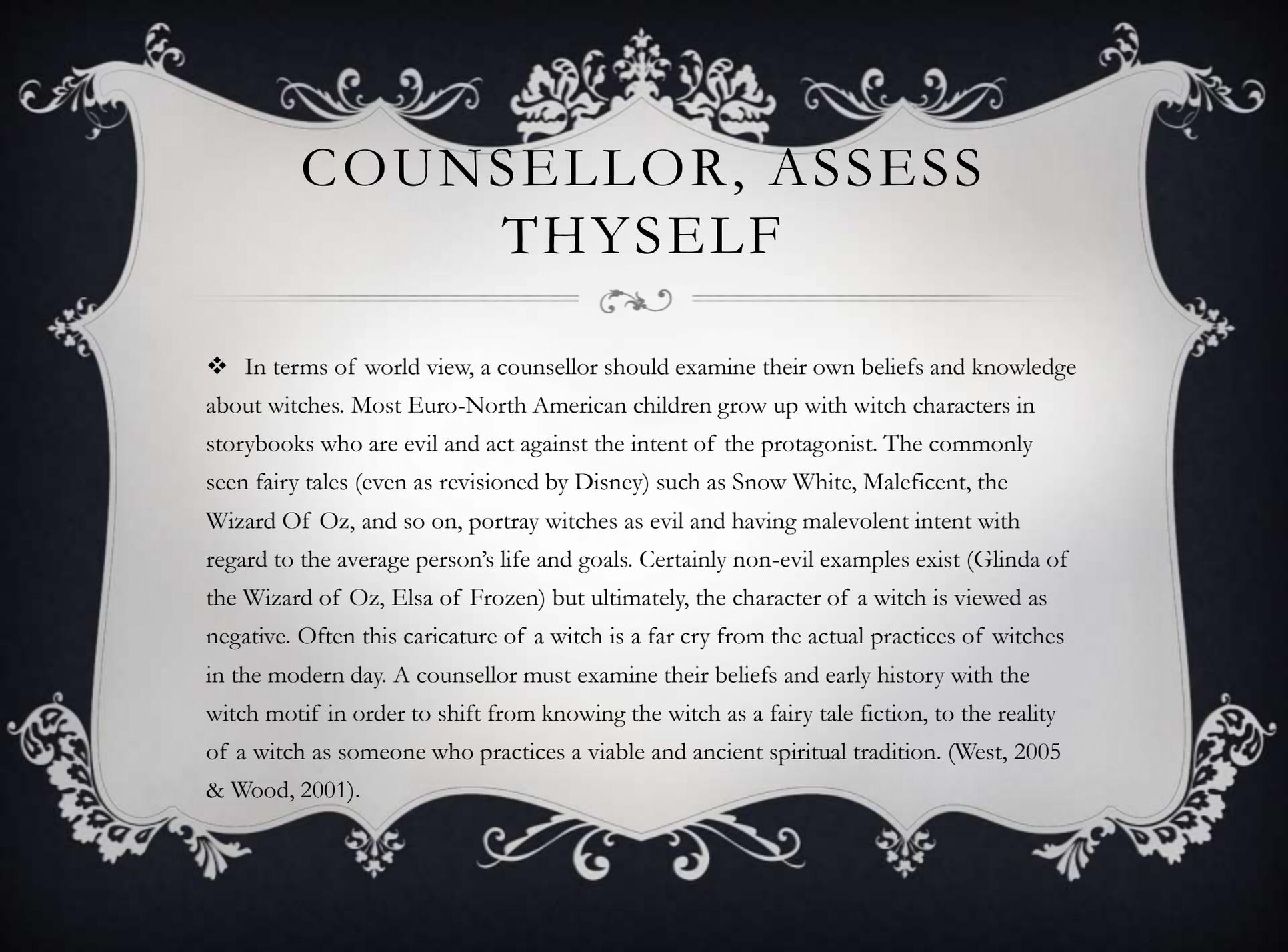
FILLING THE GAPS

❖ Not all is lost however. The PsychINFO search produced several hits that appeared to focus on the clinical aspect of working with witches. Beiser (1985) reported on a case of a 34 year old Native Canadian woman who described herself as a witch and believed she had killed her mother through witchcraft. The tone of the article suggests that the clinician chose to support the client's belief system in the treatment process but did so simply as a means of facilitating a normal course of recovery for an issue of grief and loss. Olsson (1985) reports on the treatment of a self-identified warlock whose main support was a white witch coven. The treatment is described by the author as "unusual" in that the therapist chose to interpret the client's identification with witchcraft as metaphorical. The resulting treatment process was a constant reinterpretation of the client's witchcraft worldview into a psychodynamic one, allowing on the one hand for successful resolution of issues but at the same time, partially marginalizing the client's world view.



CULTURE INFUSED COUNSELLING

❖ Arthur and Collins (2010) present a general model for addressing and ‘infusing’ cultural sensitivity in the counselling process. They propose three domains for the counsellor to manage as they work with cultural competency. The first asks the counsellor to be aware of their own (cultural) biases and assumptions about the world. The second asks the counsellor to obtain accurate cultural knowledge about the client (or client group). The third links cultural knowledge with a culturally sensitive working alliance – building the connection with the client based on an understanding of the client’s culture.



COUNSELLOR, ASSESS THYSELF

❖ In terms of world view, a counsellor should examine their own beliefs and knowledge about witches. Most Euro-North American children grow up with witch characters in storybooks who are evil and act against the intent of the protagonist. The commonly seen fairy tales (even as revisioned by Disney) such as Snow White, Maleficent, the Wizard Of Oz, and so on, portray witches as evil and having malevolent intent with regard to the average person's life and goals. Certainly non-evil examples exist (Glinda of the Wizard of Oz, Elsa of Frozen) but ultimately, the character of a witch is viewed as negative. Often this caricature of a witch is a far cry from the actual practices of witches in the modern day. A counsellor must examine their beliefs and early history with the witch motif in order to shift from knowing the witch as a fairy tale fiction, to the reality of a witch as someone who practices a viable and ancient spiritual tradition. (West, 2005 & Wood, 2001).

ALL OF THEM WITCHES

❖ In terms of cultural awareness of the client, the cultural complexity of witches is as diverse as the clients who will present for counselling. While it might be beyond the capacity of the typical counsellor to catalogue the entirety of all manifestations of witches, it is important that the counsellor avail themselves of material appropriate to the cultural understanding of the client they are seeing. The Irish Wiccan is not the Gypsy witch of Eastern Europe, who in turn is not the Eastern Canadian witch who seeks an alternative to the Church, who in turn is not the witch of African origin who serves her immigrant community as cultural, medical and spiritual carrier of tradition as they settle a Western prairie town. In the absence of reliable information about specific contexts for witches, it may be that the best source about the client is the client themselves. A counsellor who is open to experience, and willing to learn from the client, stands a good chance of being helpful.

CRAFTING THE WORKING ALLIANCE

❖ The working alliance has been described as the counsellor and client working together to establish goal, task to meet those goals, and doing so in the context of a supportive relationship (Borden, 1979). When working with a witch, it may help to understand the working alliance as co-created. Given the position of sending positive energy out to the universe, it may help to initiate the counselling process with a partially-ritualized invocation of the positive intent of both parties to engage in a process that honours and respects the strengths of each person involved, prior to delving into the areas that are not as positive. The counsellor is more likely to find themselves in the role of guide or companion at times in the therapy. At the same time, the witch client will be acutely aware of power dynamics in relationships and it is likely that the counsellor may be called upon to either exercise a greater power differential that they are typically comfortable with (i.e., be more directive) or conversely, take on a more egalitarian role, with less expertise assumed on the part of the counsellor.(Eisler, 1988).

PAGAN-FRIENDLY COUNSELLING MODEL

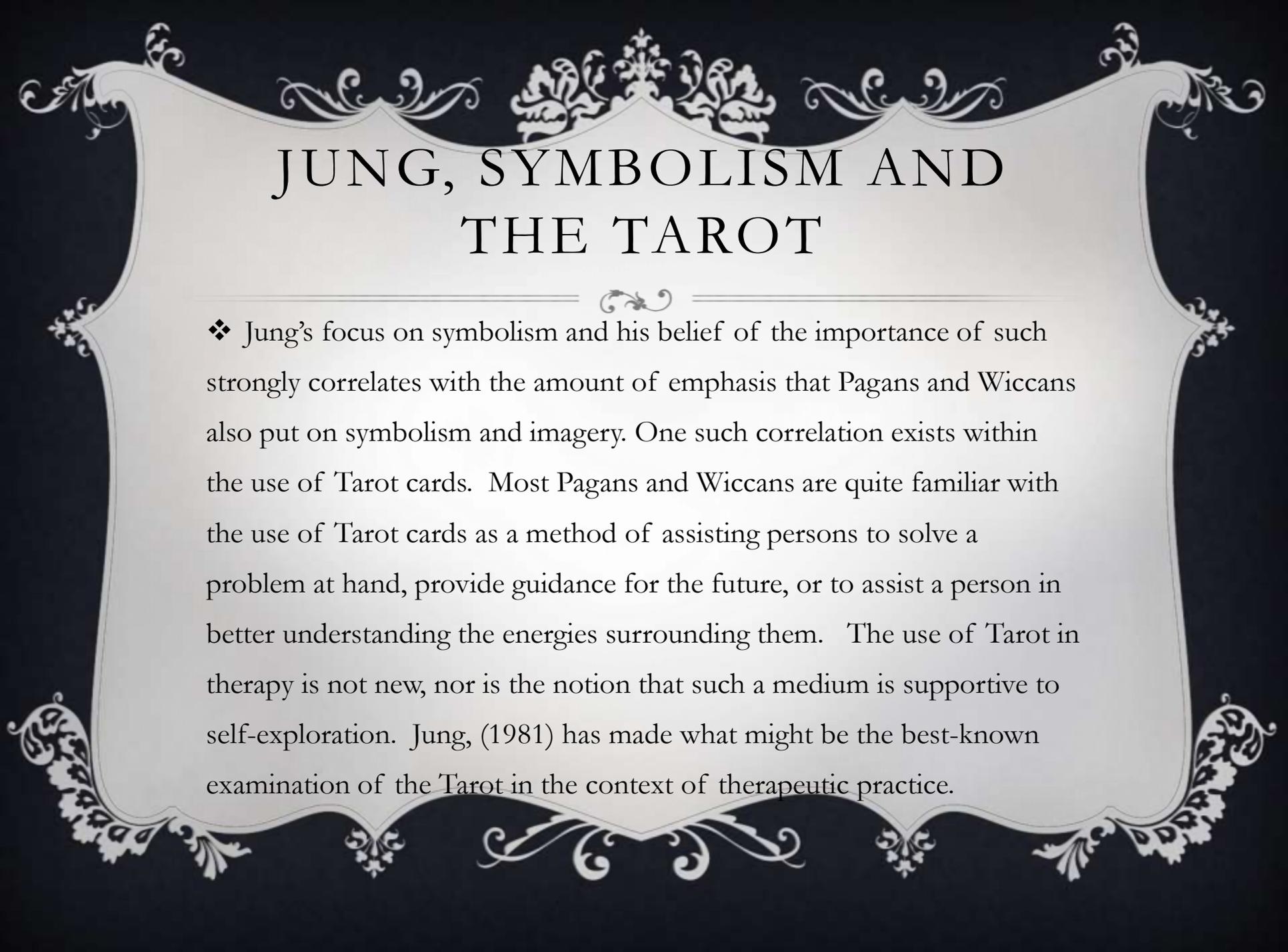
❖ In the spirit (pardon the pun) of looking to infuse counselling with Pagan-friendly practices, we propose to merge Pagan practice with therapeutic methods. This, believe it or not, has subtly been introduced by many of Carl Jung's writings. As it is well known, Jung valued the presence of unseen forces and the impact they have on our personality and behaviour. He has tied such unseen forces to religion many times. Specifically, in his (1938/1966) essays compiled together in "Psychology and Religion", Jung discussed the impact of religion (inclusive of Paganism) on a person's collective unconscious, dreams and neuroses. In his writings, he set the tone of the religious climate at the time, which can be argued, still exists today. Jung (1938/1966) said "spiritualization and sublimation are emphatically Christian principles and any insistence upon the contrary would result in blasphemous paganism (p.32)". However, he continues on to indicate that these limited Christian views do not encourage practitioners to engage in friendliness and joy, which he associates with the Dionysian Pagans

JUNG AND PAGANISM

❖ Through Jung's writings, it appears that Jung was attempting to expand the mindset of his readers and colleagues while also trying to reduce or eliminate the stigma, biases and hatred that existed toward non-monotheistic religions. Feist & Feist (2009) discuss the underlying premise of Jung's analytical psychology as resting "on the assumption that occult phenomena can and do influence the lives of everyone" (p.98). Yesterday and today, Paganism has been considered (wrongly) within the realm of the occult. Therefore, it can be argued that from a Jungian perspective, understanding and acknowledging Paganism would be a wholly effective way of aiding a more diverse population and would be closely aligned with the trajectory of focus that Jung would be taking today. With this in mind, we would aim to continue and further that goal.

JUNG AND PAGANISM CTD.

❖ To do so, it may be helpful to link Jung's practice of analytical psychology to some of the foundations of Pagan belief system. In any religious setting, symbols and imagery are quite apparent. To Jung, symbols and images present in both the conscious and unconscious realm can aid therapists in understanding the world through the eyes of the client (Jung, 1968). Jung valued these images significantly and sought not to dismiss or discredit any report of a symbol or image in a client's thoughts or dreams (Jung, 1966).



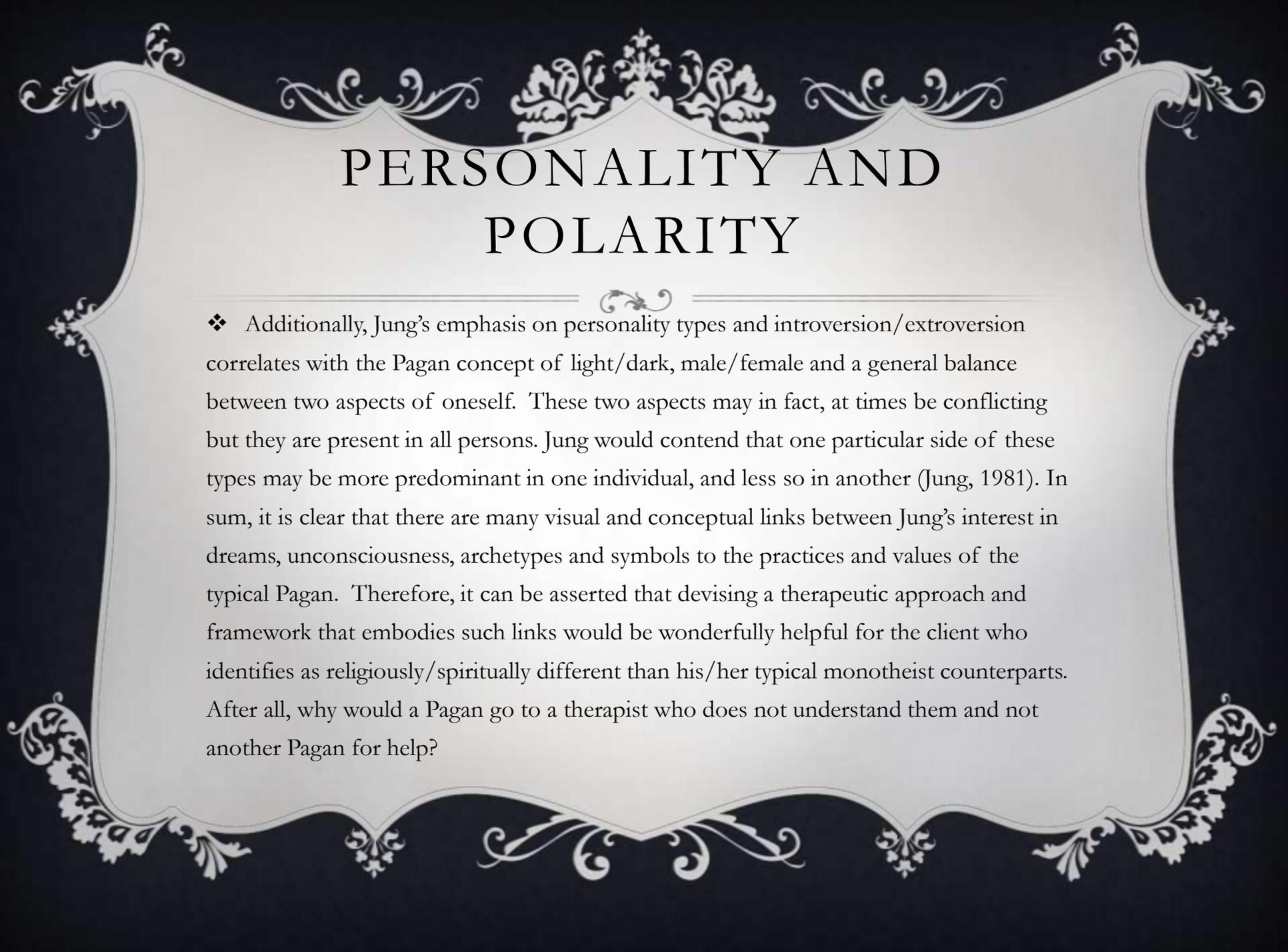
JUNG, SYMBOLISM AND THE TAROT

❖ Jung's focus on symbolism and his belief of the importance of such strongly correlates with the amount of emphasis that Pagans and Wiccans also put on symbolism and imagery. One such correlation exists within the use of Tarot cards. Most Pagans and Wiccans are quite familiar with the use of Tarot cards as a method of assisting persons to solve a problem at hand, provide guidance for the future, or to assist a person in better understanding the energies surrounding them. The use of Tarot in therapy is not new, nor is the notion that such a medium is supportive to self-exploration. Jung, (1981) has made what might be the best-known examination of the Tarot in the context of therapeutic practice.



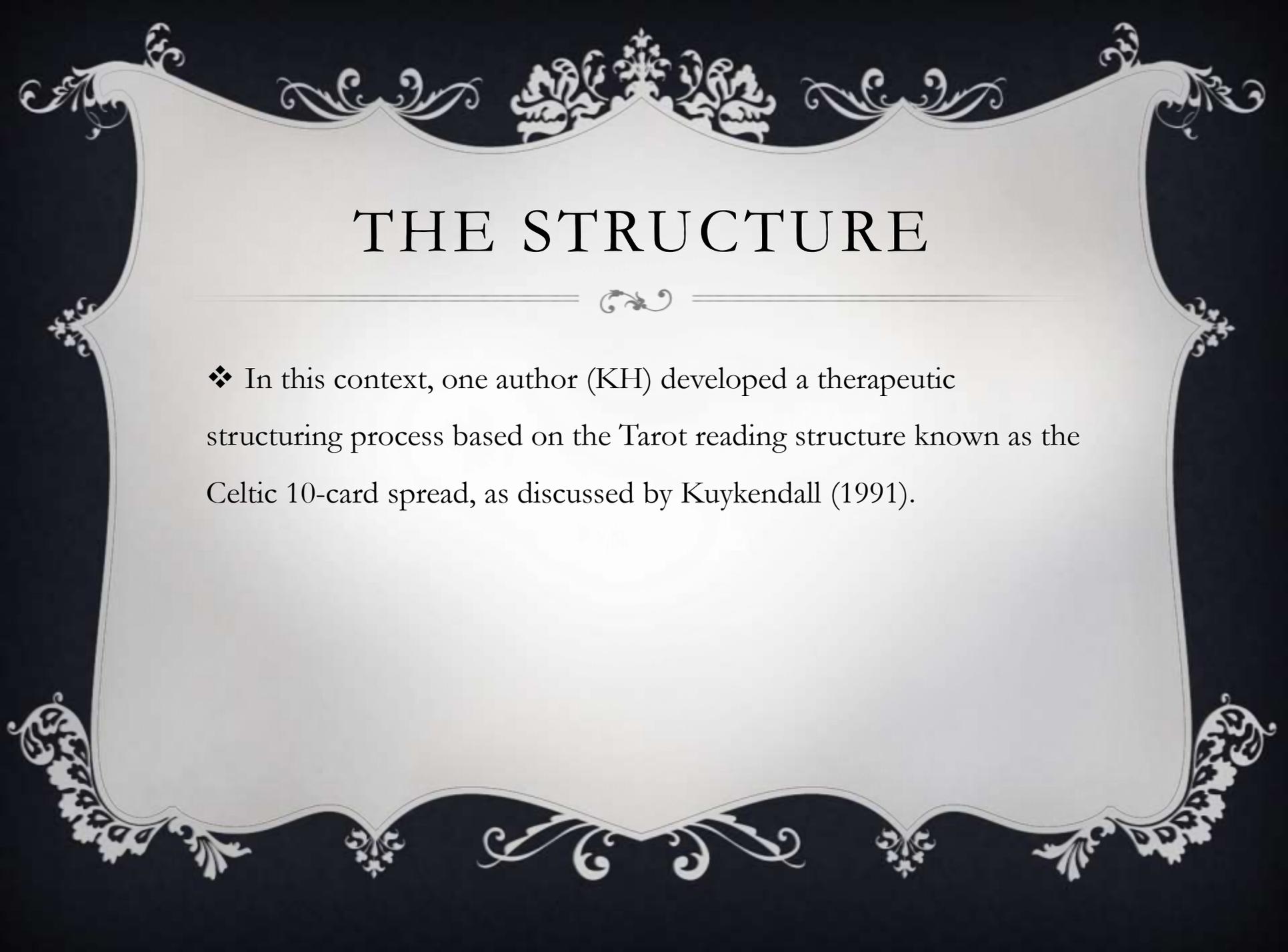
ARCHETYPES AND THE TAROT

❖ As many practitioners are aware, one of the biggest contributors to Jung's falling out with Freud lay with Jung's assertion of the existence of the collective unconscious and the existence or non-existence of unseen forces, myth or the supernatural, and their direct effect on the human psyche (Jung, 1955). Jung (1981) wrote "it also seems as if the set of pictures in the Tarot cards were distantly descended from the archetypes of transformation, a view that has been confirmed for me in a very enlightening lecture by professor [Rudolph] Bernoulli" (p. 38). His contention was that the symbols presented on standard Tarot decks could be representative of the many archetypes we assume. Cheung (2006/2009) wrote "symbols are the language of the subconscious mind, and both Tarot and dreams speak to us in exactly the same way...some dream experts (Jung) believe it is a natural marriage to combine Tarot and dreams to at once deepen and enhance the understanding of dream symbols whilst also expanding one's understanding of Tarot...Jung saw all the Tarot images as being descended from the archetypes of transformation" (p.374).



PERSONALITY AND POLARITY

❖ Additionally, Jung's emphasis on personality types and introversion/extroversion correlates with the Pagan concept of light/dark, male/female and a general balance between two aspects of oneself. These two aspects may in fact, at times be conflicting but they are present in all persons. Jung would contend that one particular side of these types may be more predominant in one individual, and less so in another (Jung, 1981). In sum, it is clear that there are many visual and conceptual links between Jung's interest in dreams, unconsciousness, archetypes and symbols to the practices and values of the typical Pagan. Therefore, it can be asserted that devising a therapeutic approach and framework that embodies such links would be wonderfully helpful for the client who identifies as religiously/spiritually different than his/her typical monotheist counterparts. After all, why would a Pagan go to a therapist who does not understand them and not another Pagan for help?



THE STRUCTURE

❖ In this context, one author (KH) developed a therapeutic structuring process based on the Tarot reading structure known as the Celtic 10-card spread, as discussed by Kuykendall (1991).

10-Step Therapeutic Method for the Spiritually Enlightened

Step 1: Current Disposition
Where the client is now

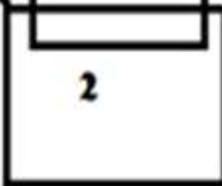
Step 2: Obstacles
Issues currently preventing step 3

Step 3: Immediate Goal based on presenting issue in step 1

Step 4: Past - when did problem start/become worse

Step 5: Why now?

Step 6: Future or Overarching Goal - how would client like to change?

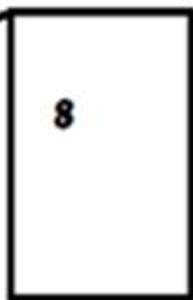
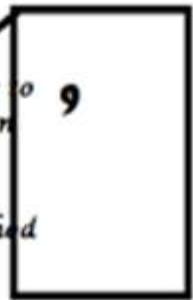
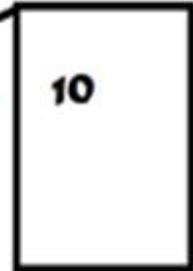


Step 7: Direction - Subgoals/steps and determining paths for intervention

Step 8: Path selection - choice of plan

Step 9: Internal Conditions - Emotional factors to bear in mind when finalizing appropriate intervention method

Step 10: Selection and articulation of intervention method to client



Steps 1-6 - Problem Exploration/Goal Refinement

Steps 7-10 - Direction and Intervention Planning

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

❖ In short, the 10-card spread begins with a card that represents the client's current disposition. The second card represents obstacle(s) that are preventing the client from moving forward. The third card represents an immediate goal that could be realized given cards one and two. The fourth card represents the past, specifically when the current problem likely originated. The fifth card looks at current causation, in other words "why is the client in this situation now?" The sixth card represents the future and over-arching goal the client wishes to achieve by resolution of the current situation. The seventh card represents the possibly several sub-goals needing to be achieved in order to be better able to choose a possible path for change. The eighth card represents the process of selecting the path to take. The ninth card addresses the internal conditions that need to change within the client in order for the change to take hold. Lastly, the 10th card is effectively the articulation of the method/intervention for making these changes. We suggest that this pattern of reading parallels good general clinical practice with clients as seen in the literature (for example, see Gustafson 2005).



WHY IT WORKS

❖ The strengths of this therapeutic method are that it is applicable and useful with many situations and clients. It would be helpful for intervention planning; general guidance and direction; development of goals; and, clarity and interpretation. In addition, this approach can assist with teaching clients about their own energy, its importance, and how to channel it at a specific goal. It is not limited to or restricted by the presence or absence of spirituality within a client. Whether a person believes or does not believe in the usefulness of Tarot readings is irrelevant. Rather, this pattern can be applicable to a multitude of clientele, and utilized in conjunction with many different theoretical foundations.



WHY IT APPLIES

❖ This approach exists and functions both inside and outside of the realm of Paganism and tarot readings. In fact, this approach to the average person would seem absent of spirituality, but to the practicing Polytheist – they would recognize the pattern of questions as similar to the Celtic 10-card spread pattern of Tarot readings (MacGregor & Vega, 1998). Therefore, spiritualists who are reluctant to seek assistance from a traditional therapist may feel more inclined to seek assistance if they were comfortable and familiar with the approach and practice of this method.



QUESTIONS?

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